



UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND UNIVERSITY HEALTH CENTER

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Bacterial Vaginosis

Some vaginal discharge is a perfectly normal part of your body's cleaning and lubricating system. The amount and type of vaginal discharge varies throughout the normal menstrual cycle and can vary from woman to woman. Many types of bacteria and yeast are present in the normal healthy vagina. The predominant bacteria in the normal healthy vagina is Lactobacillus. Lactobacilla keep the vaginal pH slightly acidic and reduce the growth of potentially harmful organisms. Women who have bacterial vaginosis have decreased numbers of Lactobacilli and so potentially harmful bacteria increase in number. Bacterial vaginosis is the most common type of bacterial infection.

Symptoms

- A profuse watery or thick, creamy yellow or greenish gray discharge.
- Discharge with a characteristic sharp or "fishy" odor.
- Burning, itching or swelling of the vaginal opening or labia.
- A pressure sensation in the lower abdomen.
- The sensation of having to urinate frequently.
- Irritation or discomfort with intercourse.
- Bleeding between periods.

Treatment

Bacterial vaginosis can be treated with an oral antibiotic (Flagyl/Metronidazole) or a vaginal cream (Metrogel or Cleocin vaginal cream). If you are treated with pills, take them with meals. Whether you are treated with Flagyl/Metronidazole pills or Metrogel vaginal gel do not drink alcohol as it may cause severe gastrointestinal discomfort. There is risk to a pregnancy if Flagyl/ Metronidazole or Cleocin vaginal cream is taken during early pregnancy. If you are pregnant or anticipate becoming pregnant please speak to your provider before taking any medicines. Abstinence is advised during the treatment. Use condoms for at least 2 weeks after treatment is started. The pH of semen may promote this bacterial imbalance in some women.

Prevention

You can reduce your chances of having vaginosis if you:

- Wear cotton underwear; do not wear underwear at night while sleeping.
- Avoid use of deodorant tampons and vaginal sprays.
- Avoid douching.
- Avoid repeated self treatment with over-the-counter vaginal creams without diagnosis.
- Wipe from front to back after a bowel movement.
- Since the advent of AIDS, anal intercourse is considered high-risk activity even with the use of a condom. If you participate in anal intercourse, use a different condom for rectal and vaginal penetration.

Reviewed 8.05

Published for the University of Maryland community.

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